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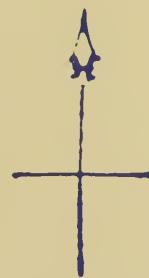
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A Kaskaskia Chronology.
by Herb Meyer.

ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY



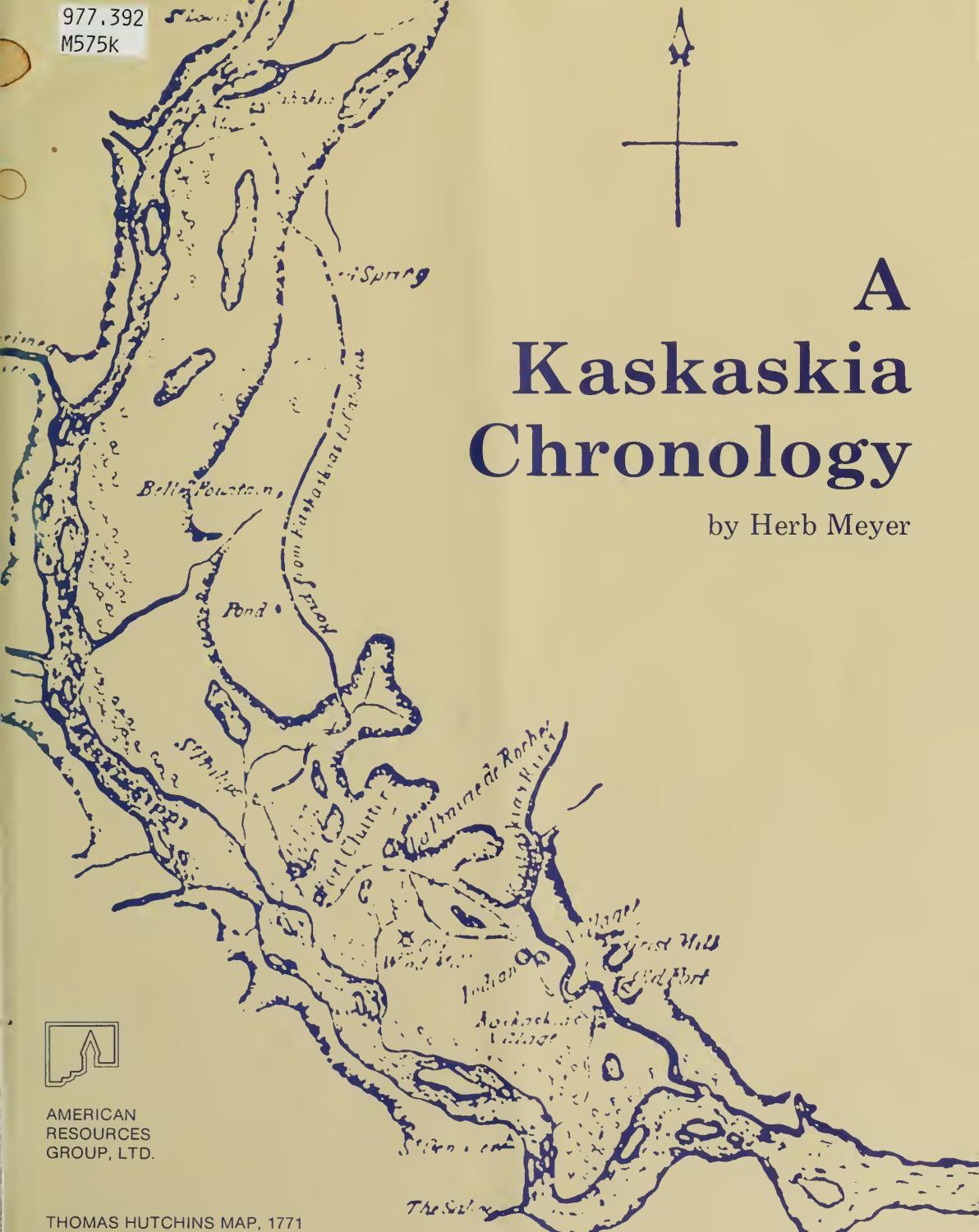
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THOMAS HUTCHINS MAP, 1771

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ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY

THE KASKASKIA MANUSCRIPTS

Illinois Historical Survey

The Kaskaskia Manuscript Collection of over 6,000 documents is a major archival resource for studies of the French Colonial period. The Collection, predominantly in French, dates from 1714 to 1816 and contains mainly the notarial archives — land grants, deeds, marriage contracts, wills, estate inventories, and labor and building abstracts. These documents were created by eighteenth century notaries in the villages of Kaskaskia, Fort de Chartres, Prairie du Rocher, and St. Philippe.

The value of the documents is unquestionable. They present remarkably detailed views of eighteenth century colonial life. Rich in materials relating not only to the social institutions of village life such as the church, marriage, and slavery, the collection also relates to wider subjects such as exploration and trade, economic and military history, roles of women, and the roles of blacks and Indians.

Chronology

France in the New World

- 1605 to 1670** The beginning period of French colonization of the New World. By 1666, the population of New France (in what is now eastern Canada) is more than 3,400. The scene is set for the coming of the French to the Valley of the Mississippi.
- 1630 to 1667** The Illinois (Illini) Indian tribes attempt to withstand the westward-spreading tide of the Iroquois. The Iroquois Conquest (1655-67) forces the once-dominant Illini to abandon their ancient seat on the Illinois River and seek safety on the west side of the Mississippi. (During this time there has not yet been any contact between the Indians and the Europeans in the region of the Illini.)

The Opening of the Illinois Country

- 1673** From Quebec, the expedition of Jolliet and Marquette explores the Mississippi as far southward as the mouth of the Arkansas. On their return, the two Frenchmen visit the Great (Indian) Village of the Illinois on the Illinois River.
- 1674** A few French traders are established by this time on the Illinois River. European trade goods, which may have filtered into the Illinois Country as early as 1655, are increasingly available.
- 1679** Hennepin and La Salle visit the Illini, who had begun to return to their original lands about 1670.
- 1680** In a series of increasingly savage maraudings, the Iroquois defeat the disunited Illinois tribes and drive them from their country. The scattered tribes reassemble after Fort St. Louis is completed in 1683.
- 1682 to 1683** Fort St. Louis is built by La Salle and Tonti on Starved Rock. European trade goods by now are becoming plentiful in the region. French traders group about the mission among the Kaskaskias on the upper Illinois River, and there the first definite settlement of whites develops in the Illinois Country.
- By 1689, the total population of the complex of Illini villages surrounding the fort is about 18,000. But harassment by the Iroquois continues through 1691, and La Salle's dream of an Indian empire vanishes as the confederacy slowly falls apart. By 1691 the Fort St. Louis site is abandoned by the Illini tribes because firewood sources are depleted in the surrounding area. The community is reestablished further down the Illinois River (Peoria). Father Gravier is appointed missionary to the Illini and establishes, in 1693, the first permanent mission.

The Establishment of Kaskaskia in Southern Illinois

- 1690 to 1700** Internal dissention, tribal conflict and other changes cause increasing migration of several tribes southward from the old Illini territories. The Tamaroa and Cahokia establish neighboring villages in the vicinity of present-day Cahokia, where Father de St. Cosme establishes a mission in 1699.
- 1700** Father Gabriel Marest leaves "Chicagaua" and travels south with Chief Rouensa and the peacable Kaskaskia, who want to get away from offending neighbors on the upper Illinois. They reach the village of the Tamaroa at Cahokia in the late fall. Later they move to the opposite side of the Mississippi from the Cahokia mission, at a place now part of south St. Louis and they remain here until 1703. Soon they are joined by many of the Tamaroa.
- 1701** Charles Juchereau de St. Denys receives a royal patent for a tannery concession in the Illinois Country.
- 1702** The Juchereau party sets out for a site on the Ohio River just south of the present Grand Chain community and commences the tannery operation.
- 1703** In April, Father Marest, the Kaskaskia and the Tamaroa abandon their three-year home on the Des Peres River and journey southward to establish a new village on "the river called the Michigamea," now known as the Kaskaskia River. The location of the new village is on the west bank "two leagues upstream from the Mississippi." Here the mission of the Kaskaskia is established. A few French traders and their Indian wives settle with the Jesuits, and the village of Kaskaskia is begun.
- 1704** Illinois, Kentucky, and Missouri tribes, angered by the inroads upon their game made by Juchereau's buffalo hunters, come together to attack the outpost. Disease subsequently brings about the end of the tannery settlement.
- 1711** Penicaut, one of a dozen men sent from the south to restrain some traders (*courreurs de bois*) causing trouble among the Indians in the region, writes the first description of life in the village of Kaskaskia.
- Domestic cattle by now have been introduced into the region. The Jesuits have begun to prosper in their agricultural enterprises around Kaskaskia; foremost among these is raising wheat for much of New France.
- 1714** Father Marest dies, a victim of a summer epidemic which ravages the area.
- 1717** Conflict between the Illini tribes and the Iroquois finally ceases. The Illinois Country officially becomes part of the Louisiana Colony.

The Strengthening of French Holdings in America

- 1717 to 1722** Civil government is established for the new province of Illinois. The Illinois Country previously had been considered a part of Canada; now it is formally annexed to Louisiana. New officials of the province come up the Mississippi in 1718 and live in Kaskaskia. Among them is Pierre Degue de Boisbriant, the new commandant. He, his soldiers, and a few laborers arrive from New Orleans and lodge with villagers until a new fort can be built 16 miles to the northwest. Construction is begun in 1719 on a site near the Mississippi. The Kaskaskia Indians move from Kaskaskia to their own village site one league northwest (probably in 1719).
- 1720** The first Fort de Chartres is completed. It is small, made of posts or palisades in a square plan with two bastions. The center of provincial government moves to the fort, and soon after, the village of the Prairie of Fort de Chartres (St. Anne) originates close by.
- During this same time following the completion of the fort, an Indian village is established on a low ridge a half-league northwest. The Michigamea who live here are joined by Kaskaskia Indians from their village near French Kaskaskia.
- Kaskaskia itself is described as having about 80 houses. A large new church of stone, "the finest in the colony," replaces the first church which had been built of log posts.
- 1722** Prairie du Rocher is established at about this time.
- 1723** D'Artaguette writes: "There is a church outside of the fort and some dwellings a half a league lower down, on the same side, as well as half a league above as far as the little village of the Illinois, where there are two Jesuit fathers, missionaries, who have a dwelling and a church. This little village which is called Mechiquamias numbers perhaps about 200 warriors."
- 1725** By 1725 the original Fort de Chartres is deteriorating. A second palisade fort possibly is begun at this time and completed by 1726. Evidently it is built at a site further from the Mississippi than the first and has four bastions at corners of a 160-foot square.
- 1726** A major flood covers the Mississippi valley.
- 1732** Kaskaskia is said to have a population of 388 whites, and two years later is described as "in its heyday." The second Fort de Chartres already is deteriorating.
- 1735** This is the traditional date for the establishment of Old St. Genevieve a few miles west and across the Mississippi River from Kaskaskia. But there is some evidence for a date as early as 1732 or as late as 1752.
- 1736** The Michigamea are "living at their village just north of Fort de Chartres" with 250 warriors. The mission at this village ceases to function in this year.
- 1747** Fort de Chartres II is evacuated by its French garrison, most of which moves to Kaskaskia.

- 1751** Fort de Chartres II is in advanced decay. However, it evidently is reoccupied during at least part of the time from 1747 to 1756.
- 1752** A thousand warriors of the Sioux, the Sauks (Sac) and the Kickapoo, under the banner of the Fox Indians, come down the Mississippi in 180 canoes to attack the Illini in revenge for a previous incident. They massacre men, women and children in the Michigamea village near Fort de Chartres while most of the men are absent, attending the ceremony of the Feast of Corpus Christi at the fort.
- 1753** Foundations are laid for a new Fort de Chartres on a site near the Mississippi about one-half mile northwest of the original fort.
A new church in Kaskaskia, under construction since 1739, is finally completed. Also in about 1753 a new fort is ordered built and is completed on a knoll next to the Kaskaskia River just southeast of the village, near the Jesuit compound. This probably is a very small blockhouse or compound.

War, Uncertainty, and Change

- 1754** At the outbreak of the French and Indian War against the English, the French commandant of the Fort de Chartres garrison recruits 300 Illini to join the fight at Fort Necessity, where Washington is forced to surrender.
- 1756** The new Fort de Chartres (III), built of stone at enormous expense to the French, is completed.
- 1757** Growing French fears of English advances prompt hurried construction of a new fort on the Ohio. Completed in 1757, it is later known as Fort Massac.
- 1759** Quebec falls, and with it the power of France in America. Work on a new French palisade fort (Fort Kaskaskia) on the bluffs above the town is begun evidently in 1759, but this fortification is in ruins by the time the British arrive in 1765.
- 1763** The French and Indian War ends. The Treaty of Paris cedes all land east of the Mississippi to England; the Illinois Country becomes a British possession. (Unknown to the French in the Mississippi valley, the lands west of the Mississippi had been ceded to Spain in 1762.)
In September, a courier reaches Fort de Chartres with news that the Jesuit order in Louisiana has been abolished. The Jesuits are forced to leave their missions and possessions abruptly, and their major role in the territory is ended before the end of the year. In November, Laclede arrives at Fort de Chartres to spend the winter.

1764 In the spring, Pontiac visits the French commandant at Fort de Chartres and proposes joint war against the British. Rebuffed, he goes to the Michigamea village for a traditional ceremony or dance of war. In June the main force of the French evacuates all forts in the Illinois Country, and many French civilians begin to seek safety on the west side of the Mississippi.

In July a disappointed Pontiac returns to Detroit. Floods threaten Fort de Chartres III and its nearby village. Further up the Mississippi, Laclede begins his trading post opposite Cahokia, and many Kaskaskia families (50 by 1765) move to this future St. Louis.

1765 After numerous delays and false starts, partly resulting from Indian opposition, the British arrive in the Illinois Country to take command of Fort de Chartres. On October 10 the fort is released to them by a small French garrison. No shot ever has been fired in anger by the fort, which the British rename Fort Cavendish. By this time, the Mississippi River is 100 yards from the fort's west structures, and nearby St. Anne is depopulated and "half in the river."

The British Period

1766 Fort de Chartres III is in a deteriorating condition, increasingly threatened and flood-damaged by the Mississippi.

In the spring of this year, 15 cabins are reported remaining at the village of the Indian Kaskaskias, three miles northwest of French Kaskaskia.

By August, the encroaching bank of the Mississippi is 26 yards from the point of the southwest bastion of Fort de Chartres. An island has formed opposite the fort.

Kaskaskia itself is at low ebb of population, many of its inhabitants having fled in apprehension of the British. It is the end of a 45-year period during which its size and population has been stable.

In October, Fort Kaskaskia opposite the village burns. A period of six years of severe hardship and tribulation begins for those habitants remaining in Kaskaskia. The predominately French period of its life has come to a close.

1768 Companies of the 18th Royal Irish Regiment arrive at Ft. Chartres in September from Ft. Pitt. A series of letters describing life in the fort and in the region is written by an Ensign Butricke, a soldier in the regiment.

Father Gibault comes to Kaskaskia.

1769 Pontiac is murdered at Cahokia. The resultant threats of Indian uprisings cause the British garrison great fear, but only minor maraudings are noted.

1771 The "approaching ruin of Fort de Chartres" and the travails of its garrison are described in British military correspondence.

- 1772** Fort de Chartres is ordered abandoned by the British. Most of the 18th Royal Irish garrison leaves the fort and sets out for Fort Pitt, leaving a detachment of 50 men in Kaskaskia. An attempt is made to hasten the fort's destruction by opening its drains. Apparently during this year the two west bastions and the west wall are swept away by the river.
- In Kaskaskia, the remaining British detachment builds a wood palisade wall around the old Jesuit compound at the southeast edge of the village. This makeshift fortification is named Fort Gage.
- 1773** Both the Kaskaskia and the Michigamea Indian villages are reported to be "well-populated."
- 1776** In late May, the small British detachment still at Fort Gage in Kaskaskia departs and goes to Detroit, leaving British affairs in this region in the hands of a single agent, Phillippe Rocheblave, who continues to reside in the fort.
- 1778** George Rogers Clark's expedition down the Ohio and across Southern Illinois succeeds, and Clark occupies Kaskaskia without serious incident in July. Plans are laid for a march on the British at Vincennes.
- 1779** In February, after a difficult march through the Southern Illinois wilderness in bitter winter, Clark's small army besieges and forces the surrender of Hamilton's garrison at Vincennes. With this victory comes the end of British dominance in the Illinois Country.

The American Period

- 1777 to 1787** A period of hardship and anarchy, which had begun with the British occupation and continued with the breakdown of civil order during the years immediately after the defeat of the British, prevails in Kaskaskia and the region.
- In 1784 one John Dodge and his "band of toughs" seizes the burned remains of the old fort on the bluff and terrorizes the villagers for "several years." In 1785 a major flood damages Kaskaskia and forces the removal of Old St. Genevieve to a higher site four miles upriver.
- The population of Kaskaskia is said to have declined to 349 whites by 1787. However, "immigration from the country east of the Alleghanies had begun; enterprising merchants saw the advantages of the location as a trading point; English (American) blood became infused into the village; and the slow and sleepy life of an exclusively French settlement gradually gave way to greater activity." American frontier boom times were soon to be felt in the old village.
- 1783** The Illini Indian population declines. The Kaskaskia Indians range up the Kaskaskia and Big Muddy rivers until about 1786, when access to the upper reaches is denied them by the Kickapoo. A struggle with the Shawnee over use of the southern portion of the territory commences. Until about 1795, Indians also maraud white settlers in the region, which includes Monroe County.
- 1785** A major flood of the Mississippi causes the abandonment of Old St. Genevieve and causes much damage and hardship in Kaskaskia.

- 1787** Illinois becomes part of the new Northwest Territory under the United States government.
- 1802** The Kaskaskia Indians lose a decisive battle with the Shawnee, and in the following year cede to the U. S. government their claims to all lands in Illinois. They establish their last village in Illinois near the Big Muddy River south of present-day Sand Ridge in Jackson County. Another reservation is provided by the government at "Kaskaskia Village" (several miles northwest of the old French village).
- By this time buffalo have become extinct in Illinois.
- 1804** Most Kaskaskia Indians remaining at the Kaskaskia Village reservation choose to move to the one near Sand Ridge.
- Bounty lands are set aside in the frontier region; land offices are established in Vincennes and in Kaskaskia; and a tide of settlement and westward growth is under way.
- 1809** Kaskaskia, near its peak of population and commercial activity, becomes the capital of the Territory of Illinois. During the winter of 1809-1810, the frontier town is described as having "...more gaiety, carousal and amusement...than the town has ever since known."
- Between 1810 and 1818 the town's population approaches 1,000, although the number is indefinite because of transient visitors and tradespeople.
- 1812** The first territorial legislature meets at Kaskaskia.
- 1812 to 1814** The War of 1812 coincides with a renewal of "Indian troubles" in Illinois. A number of small forts or blockhouses are built by settlers in 1812; rude structures on the site of old Fort Kaskaskia are used by settlers who move there until the war ends.
- 1818** Illinois becomes a state, and Kaskaskia is named its capital. Its size, population, and importance are at their maximum.
- 1820** The state capital is moved from Kaskaskia to Vandalia. The decline of the town begins.
- 1833** The remnant Illini Indians in Illinois, less than a hundred men, women, and children, are removed from the Sand Ridge reservation westward from the state. This marks the end of the natural residence of Indians in Illinois.
- 1838** In Kaskaskia the cornerstone is laid for a new church to be built of brick, replacing the mouldering old church of 1753. The church is completed in 1843.

The Decline and Death of Kaskaskia

- 1844** A devastating Mississippi River flood, the worst since 1785, destroys much of Kaskaskia and gives the finishing blow to the town's waning prosperity. The population at this time is less than 500.
- 1844 to 1880** Of this period of Kaskaskia's history there is meager description. Many occupants move after the 1844 flood, especially to Chester and St. Genevieve. The older buildings and properties which survive the flood gradually fall into ruin. The population by 1880 has declined to about 300.
- Some time after about 1863, the Mississippi River begins a shift eastward, at a place just south of St. Genevieve. By 1879 this shift has resulted in a large bend, the easternmost part of which comes to within a half mile of the Kaskaskia River about six linear miles above the point where the smaller river empties into the larger.
- For several years the Mississippi undermines and carries away many acres of Kaskaskia farm land, including the house of the first governor of Illinois, Shadrach Bond, about one mile west of Kaskaskia. Unusually heavy snows in the north during the 1880-81 winter result in severe flood conditions by April of 1881.
- 1881** "The Narrows" between the rivers is reduced to about 500 feet by April, and on the night of April 18 the Mississippi breaks through. On the 19th, a raging torrent is sweeping into the old Kaskaskia channel; and by the 20th, the Mississippi has engulfed it and is forming its own new and larger channel. Within a few days steamboats are passing through the new cut, where soundings show a depth of 66 feet.
- The old town of Kaskaskia is not entirely flooded in 1881, but the swift, cutting current makes it apparent that the town is doomed. Year after year, mostly between 1886 and 1905, the bank is carried away and with it more and more of the town, its buildings, and streets.
- 1891 to 1895** The old church dating from 1843 is threatened as the crumbling bank approaches (it is razed in 1894). Most of the cemetery is removed to a site across the river on Garrison Hill, just north of the site of old Fort Kaskaskia, but some of the graves are lost to the river. Some relics of the church, including the bell cast in France in 1741 for the Kaskaskia congregation, are relocated in a new church built at a new town site 2 1/2 miles south of the old town. This new town is laid out, and a few of the buildings from Old Kaskaskia are moved there.
- 1899** Almost all of Old Kaskaskia's buildings by this time have fallen into the Mississippi. A photograph made in this year shows that the old State House building is still standing, although very close to the river bank. It falls into the river within two years.
- 1900** The population of Kaskaskia is 170.
- 1905** The old county court house (also used as a schoolhouse) and the rectory, although in badly deteriorating condition, still survive on the encroaching river bank. The courthouse is later dismantled and rebuilt as a school (which still stands) in New Kaskaskia.
- 1913** In the latter part of this year "only four or five families" remain as residents of the old town of Kaskaskia. The last residents probably leave within a few years, but the dates are unknown.
- Within two or three decades, every trace of any building or major town feature is gone. Today only the closest search of the surface of farm fields, once a part of the great village commons, reveals any trace of the vanished village and its two centuries of inhabitants.







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